Following upon this communication, I had an interview with the Shipping Controller and brought the matter to the notice of the War Cabinet on 21st December, 1916. We decided that an Inter-Departmental Committee should be at once assembled to consider and report on the question of the restriction of imports.

War Cabinet takes action

An exhaustive examination of all our imports was made, in order to determine where the necessary reductions could best be made. A programme was prepared, based on the assumption of imports being 500,000 tons a month (i.e., six million tons a year) less in 1917 than in 1916. A detailed programme of restrictions was submitted to meet the expected six-million-ton fall in our imports. The cuts proposed affected a large range of commodities. With one of the largest items, timber, and with the way in which we were able to adopt it, I deal in another section. In paper and paper-making materials a cut of 50 per cent. of the 1916 imports was proposed. To ease the strain upon our grain imports, a further drastic reduction of brewing was proposed, of which I gave an account in the chapter on Food. Feeding-stuffs for farm stocks were cut down ; and this step, by tending to bring about an earlier and more extensive killing of stock, made possible a reduction in meat imports. Altogether the proposals of the Committee were of a very drastic character, and they were

Drastic

approved with slight modification by the Government.

But meantime the intensive submarine campaign against our shipping had got under way. In the first two months of 1917, 900,000 tons of Allied and Neutral shipping were sent to the bottom, and